

April 11, 2014



AGAINST TRAFFICKING - Pope Francis has condemned human trafficking, calling it a crime against humanity, a scourge and an open wound in contemporary society. His strong words came in an address to participants at a Conference on Combating Human Trafficking that took place in the Vatican from April 9-10th. Just before his address to the participants, the Pope held a private meeting with four victims of human trafficking, now rescued, who came from Chile, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Argentina.

The conference was organized by the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales and was attended by police chiefs from around 20 countries, trafficking victims who've been rescued and religious and lay organizations who are involved in the battle against trafficking and reaching out to its victims.

In his address to the participants, the Pope noted that the meeting also draws on the expertise of law enforcement authorities, who he said: "are primarily responsible for combating this tragic reality by a vigorous application of the law."

But, continued Pope Francis, "it also includes humanitarian and social workers, whose task it is to provide victims with welcome, human warmth and the possibility of building a new life. These are two different approaches but they can and must go together."

One of the main organizers of the conference was Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, the president of the Bishops Conference in England and Wales. He spoke to Susy Hodges about the outcome of their discussions.

Listen to the full interview with Cardinal Vincent Nichols:

Cardinal Nichols said the Catholic Church in London is hoping to set up a sanctuary and recovery centre for victims of human trafficking after their rescue that will be named after Saint Josephine Bakhita. (She was a Sudanese-born slave who after she was eventually freed became a Canossian religious sister in Italy. She was canonized in 2000.) Cardinal Nichols said they are trying to raise funds for this planned centre with the help of the local Caritas network.

He described the conference against trafficking as “a global look at a global problem” and said there are four stages for trying to tackle this scourge which were used as guidelines: “Being aware, being committed, being compassionate and being cooperative.”

Asked what for him was the most shocking aspect of what the victims of human trafficking have to endure, the Cardinal replied: “the utter sense of darkness” in which the victims live and “the depth of empathy” they have for all the other victims still being held as slaves.

Cardinal Nichols said everybody at the conference was “absolutely thrilled” by Pope Francis’ strong words against the crime of human trafficking and by agreeing to meet the participants. He praised the Pope’s “determination and passion for leading the world on this matter.”

Below please find Pope Francis’ address to Participants at the Conference on Combating Human Trafficking

Greeting of the Holy Father
Conference on Combating Human Trafficking
Thursday, 10 April 2014
Your Eminences,
Brother Bishops and Priests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I greet each of you participating in this Conference, the second such gathering held here in the Vatican to promote united efforts against human trafficking. I thank Cardinal Nichols and the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales for organizing this meeting, and the Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences for hosting it.

Human trafficking is an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ. It is a crime against humanity. The very fact of our being here to combine our efforts means that we want our strategies and areas of expertise to be accompanied and reinforced by the mercy of the Gospel, by closeness to the men and women who are victims of this crime.

Our meeting today includes law enforcement authorities, who are primarily responsible for combating this tragic reality by a vigorous application of the law. It also includes humanitarian and social workers, whose task it is to provide victims with welcome, human warmth and the possibility of building a new life. These are two different approaches, but they can and must go together. To dialogue and exchange views on the basis of these two complementary approaches is quite important. Conferences such as this are extremely helpful, and, I would say, much needed.

I believe that one important sign of this is the fact that, one year after your first meeting, you have regrouped from throughout the world in order to advance your common efforts. I thank you for your readiness to work together. I pray that our Lord will assist you and that Our Lady will watch over you.

Source: Vatican Radio, April 10, 2014